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PULSE CROP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS CATER TO PRODUCER NEEDS

The upcoming Pulse Crop Development Workshops scheduled for Swift Current, Moose Jaw and Sedley on January 31 and February 1 and 2, respectively, aim to provide the latest on pulse crops where it matters most, according to Provincial Special Crops Specialist Ray McVicar.

"There is a lot of pulse crop production in southern Saskatchewan," he explains. "We found that there are many people who don't get the chance to attend Pulse Days in Saskatoon in January. We organize these workshops every year in association with the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers to make industry development information more readily accessible to southern Saskatchewan producers."

Pulse crop production in Saskatchewan has increased tremendously during the last two decades—rising from 30,000 acres in 1981 to five million acres in 2005. This increase is a result of a strong partnership between public and private stakeholders who have worked together to enhance the pulse industry, explains McVicar.

"These stakeholders include Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG), the University of Saskatchewan, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and many private companies involved in basic and applied research, processing, handling, market development and export, as well as biological and chemical product manufacturing.

"SAF continues to play a significant role in the pulse industry," continues McVicar, "mainly in the areas of research and extension. Plus, through the Agriculture Development Fund (ADF), SAF provides funding for pulse research conducted by scientists at different levels."

The workshops will feature industry displays and presentations: Market Movers for the Pulse Industry with Marlene Boersch of Mercantile Consulting Venture in Winnipeg; new research developments with Yantai Gan of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; agriculture business centres for Saskatchewan with Ken Evans (SAF); and new pulse crop varieties with Bert Vandenberg and Tom Warkentin of the University of Saskatchewan. There will be a session on insect pest management with Dan Johnson of the University of Lethbridge and Scott Hartley of SAF, and there will also be a talk entitled Pulse Futures: Food, Fuel, Nutraceuticals with Bob Tyler of the University of Saskatchewan.

McVicar believes it is important that growers and industry players like processors and others have a chance to get together.

"The whole industry is built on partnerships among the marketers, processing companies, researchers, the governments—both Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food," he says. "We have really grown together, to the point where Saskatchewan is a major player in the pulse world. So we stage these workshops because we have made this entire journey together."

To pre-register, call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 by January 27, 2006.

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AGREEMENTS BETWEEN GRAIN AND STOCK PRODUCERS COULD BE BENEFICIAL

It seems the livestock sector is enjoying renewed vigour these days, but a little caution is always in order.

One of the ways to reduce risks for both grain and livestock producers is to enter into agreements that are mutually beneficial, according to Sarah Sommerfeld, an Agri-Business Development Intern with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

The opening of the border to the United States for cattle under 30 months of age, and the reopening of the Japanese border to cattle less than 20 months of age, bode well for the industry. Producers have been and are expanding operations, and consequently they are requiring access to more forage resources.

"But expenses within the agriculture industry continue to increase, and producers are continually trying to keep costs in check," explains Sommerfeld. "Livestock operators are no exception; therefore, purchasing large acres of grazing land may not be financially viable or attractive for them. A solution may be the creation of agreements between the owners of cultivated land—grain producers—and livestock producers."

Typically, these sorts of agreements have not been very common, explains Sommerfeld, but more producers—of both livestock and grain—are slowly realizing the potential value of working together in a mutually beneficial partnership.

"For example," she elaborates, "a grain producer could contract with a livestock producer to grow an annual forage crop for swath grazing or baled green feed. An annual or perennial crop may also be grown for silage. At the start of the growing season, the intent may be to produce a crop for human consumption, but growing conditions may down-grade the crop to livestock feed. Provision of a fence and water supply could be the responsibility of either the land owner or the livestock producer."

Sommerfeld suggests that establishing these agreements presents the opportunity for grain producers to invest in livestock without extra expenses, labour or management.

"Producers might feel uneasy entering into an agreement that is not typical for their sector, whether it is livestock or grain production that is being considered," she says, "but as agriculture continues to evolve, operators must be willing to evolve along with it and to think progressively. It could mean the grain producer puts up a fence at his/her own cost or develops a water source, and recovers those expenses through the rent he or she charges the livestock producer."

These agreements take some of the risk off the livestock producer, but they also reduce the grain producer's risks because the grain producer has a guaranteed price and market for the crop.

"If the two parties can work together, and the grain farmer produces a crop that the livestock can use, then it is a win-win situation," concludes Sommerfeld.

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Week of January 9, 2006**MINIATURE HEREFORDS SEEK ACCEPTANCE IN LEAGUE OF BEEF CATTLE BREEDS**

In 1991, Unity, Saskatchewan's Jerome and Sharon Kratchmer decided to acquire some miniature Herefords. They run a mixed farm with commercial cows and grain. They also sell hay. According to Jerome, the animals seemed the right fit for their agricultural operation.

"We wanted miniatures to have them on the farm because the other cows are gone all summer, but we still wanted some cattle around," he explains. "We didn't get them as a moneymaking venture. They are small, but they have the same problems as the big cows. You can have C-sections. It is like any breed. You try to breed out the problems."

In 1742, the Tomkins family in Herefordshire, England, set out to develop a breed of high-yielding beef cattle that could survive and grow in all kinds of environments, and which was endowed with early maturity and high rates of reproduction. The first breeding herds of Herefords were brought to Canada in 1831 and into the United States in 1840. These original Herefords were much smaller than today's animals, ranging from 45 to 50 inches in height.

In the mid-1960s, a Texan rancher noted that buyers of his farm-gate beef showed a preference for smaller cuts. While his neighbours selected their Herefords to breed larger animals, he started to breed for smaller animals.

"Ours were the first ones brought into Canada, in March 1991, from Fort Davis, Texas," Kratchmer explains. "I have two dozen now." Kratchmer knows of a number of miniature Hereford owners who are not regular cattlemen.

"If you only have five acres on your acreage, you can keep them," he says. "A fellow who bought two heifers from me is going to slaughter them as he needs them for food. That is where his regular meat comes from."

In a way, the miniature Herefords are a match made in heaven for today's world, explains Kratchmer.

"It is not as physically demanding to move them around. In terms of portion size, people are eating less meat now. A steak from a miniature Hereford is similar to a pork chop in size, or a little bigger. So you are not getting a big frying pan full of just one steak," he says.

But the miniatures still face significant hurdles on their way to the beef market.

"It is the same problem as with bison," he explains. "People raised a whole bunch of bison but they didn't have a market for the meat. That is what you have to look into. The problem with miniature Herefords is that we don't have enough animals around to create a meat market yet. They don't sell for as much as the big cattle because they don't fit in."

"This is a niche market that won't take anything from the beef industry. I haven't shown them locally. They get attention. Most people simply ask: do you still have them?"

In Kratchmer's mind, every passerby who comes to his yard to admire the miniature Herefords represents an opportunity to make headway for the little breed that turns out the perfect steak.

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Week of January 9, 2006**BYOB (BUILD YOUR OWN BUSINESS) CONFERENCES COMING UP**

If the field of agri-business has ever crossed your mind as a career opportunity, you might benefit from the upcoming series of

three conferences on business-building resources, says Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Agri-Business Development Specialist Ron Monette.

"We want to talk about the opportunities that exist for rural business and to provide information on the entities that can assist entrepreneurs in exploring those opportunities," says Monette. "As a result, we will provide information on opportunities that may exist and have been looked at and developed in the area around each of the three locations."

The "BYOB" (stands for "Build Your Own Business") conferences will take place at the Bella Vista Hotel in Humboldt on January 18, at the Watrous Community Centre on January 25, and at Rosthern's St. Odillion Catholic Church Hall on February 1.

Are you one of those energetic, budding Saskatchewan entrepreneurs waiting for the opportunity to develop your idea into a thriving business that contributes to your community's well-being?

"Most of us have thought about it," states Dianne Olchowski of the Sagehill Development Corporation in Bruno, one of the conference organizing partners. "Some of us have put the idea aside for various reasons, but sometimes the itch to start your own business just won't go away, and you just have to do something about it."

To provide as much information as possible, SAF's Agri-Business Development Branch has teamed up with a number of local organizations with compatible mandates to create events that are full of value for participants. Partners include three local Regional Economic Development Authorities (REDAs), among others.

"The Sagehill Development Corporation, which is our local Community Futures organization, the Carlton Trail REDA out of Humboldt, the Saskatoon REDA, which covers Rosthern, and the Long Lake REDA, which covers Watrous, have all come on board," Monette says. "Other groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce in Humboldt, are also supporting our effort."

Local entrepreneurs and enterprises will share their successes at these events, explains Monette.

"In Watrous, we have representatives from Drake Meats and Wagon Wheels Farms coming forward; in Rosthern, it is a local pet food manufacturer that has been invited, along with Parenteau Gourmet Foods; in Humboldt, Champêtre County of St. Denis will attend, as well as Country Log Ranch, which has created a goat dairy."

The conferences would not be complete without a few guest speakers:

"At different locations, Al Scholtz will share his insight on rural entrepreneurship," says Monette. "Tom Allen of the University of Saskatchewan will talk about marketing strategies for rural businesses. We'll also have Melanie Boldt of Pineview Farms, a natural meat producer, processor and marketer of poultry, sausages and other processed meats near Martensville. Kevin Hursh will wrap up each event with a talk about opportunities in rural Saskatchewan."

Each day's opening speaker will encourage participants to think outside of the box and to recognize the specific opportunity that is right for themselves, their families and their communities. The second speaker of the day will build on the first presentation by focusing on what comes next.

"What critical actions need to be taken to ensure your chosen opportunity has the best possible chance of success as a thriving, sustainable business? The importance of knowing the marketplace for an opportunity and how to access that market is a critical element of this process," believes Monette.

Each event will also have a lunch time speaker focusing on each of the local communities' recent activities regarding business development.

"Following a hot lunch," continues Monette, "participants will meet a series of entrepreneurs who have already successfully developed their agri-business opportunity. They will identify how it worked for them, what some of the most critical issues were in developing their business, and how they successfully dealt with those issues."

The next session will focus on the event partners, who will explain to the audience what their organizations do, with particular emphasis on how they can help entrepreneurs at the early stages of business development.

The final speaker will wrap up the event at each location with a call to action based on his or her personal experience, empowering participants to follow their dreams.

To register, call the Saskatoon Agriculture Business Centre at 306-933-6128.

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Week of January 9, 2006

SASKATCHEWAN BISON NEWS: AN INDUSTRY QUARTERLY WITH ATTITUDE

Pick up a copy of Saskatchewan Bison News and it'll make an impression right away. There is something about the layout, the look and feel of the publication that makes it stand out.

The Saskatchewan Bison Association (SBA) has had a newsletter since the organization got going in the early 1990s, explains Jim Warren, executive director of the SBA and editor of Saskatchewan Bison News. The purpose of the publication was to keep members informed on industry developments, and to act as an extension arm in terms of communicating the most current production, marketing and management information to members.

"About two years ago," he says, "we determined there were things we could do to develop greater effectiveness within the organization. We had developed a strategic plan. I'd joined the association in January of 2004 and I had had some experience in communications and publishing. I presented a plan to the board that suggested we could increase readability and attract advertisers if we made a concerted effort to improve the quality of the publication."

Warren and his colleagues reviewed the editorial plan and came up with the concept of breaking the publication down into several regular sections that would appear in each edition.

"The publication always begins with the hot button issue in the industry. Anything from border issues to announcements of BSE support programs and all news developments in the industry," he explains. "In every edition, we follow that with an analysis of bison markets right across North America and here at home, and then we try to follow that up with a marketing-related news story, like European Union trade barriers. We have a feature piece on the current important issue to the industry and we address that issue in detail."

Good focus is key, believes Warren, and the right mix of stories is also important.

"It's a fast-paced world now," he says. "Many folks need jobs to support their agricultural habits. There is not always the time and opportunity to read a longer piece, so we try to keep stories short, but we always have a good meat-and-potatoes piece in each issue. Then we try to have a health and production issue piece: for example, the use of different vaccines or new research that is coming out on production."

We follow that up in the back section with news about members, especially those who are doing new and novel things in the area of marketing. Then we talk about our own events, the people who attended, and exciting things that may have happened. We also give information about which numbers people need to call. We keep them handy, and we list coming events."

At the moment, Saskatchewan Bison News has a circulation of about 550. It goes to SBA members and a number of industry stakeholders: people in the meatpacking and processing business, and people in the bison industry across North America. For Warren and his colleagues, the extra effort the publication requires is well worth the results.

"Look at a typical association newsletter. The way they do it is they have the president's report; then they have the executive director's report, then they'll have the committee reports. What tends to happen is they all pretty much repeat each other. I just thought, 'let's be like a magazine and talk about the issues!' If the president is the main spokesperson on a particular issue, we'll use him as a resource, but I try to get as many other members and people from the organization involved as possible."

Warren recalls how people would only occasionally purchase advertising before the publication was revamped.

"Sometimes, someone wanted to help out the organization and bought a sponsorship type of ad. Sometimes people had things they wanted to sell and knew this publication was going out. By improving the look, we increase readability and retention. If we put out a good product, chances are that people will want to keep it around. I wanted to make it really inviting. At the same time, we believed that, if we improved the look, it would improve our chances to attract advertisers. As a result, in the first year, the new Saskatchewan Bison News broke even. It turns out the improvements have paid for themselves."

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